Coaching in Early Grade Reading Programs: Evidence, Experiences and Recommendations

A Global Reading Network Resource

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On the cover: A coach in the Philippines provides feedback to a teacher through the USAID Basa Pilipinas program. Credit: Karen Rivera, Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC)

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Reading within Reach
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Acronyms

EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
EGR	early grade reading
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
FHI 360	Family Health International 360
GRN	Global Reading Network
LMIC	low- and middle-income countries
MER	monitoring, evaluation and research
MERIT	Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity
NEI Plus	Northern Education Initiative Plus (Nigeria)
PRP	Pakistan Reading Project
PRIMR	Primary Reading and Math Initiative (Kenya)
RaISES	Rebuilding and Improving Schools in Sierra Leone after Ebola
RANA	Reading and Numeracy Activity (Nigeria)
RARA	Reading and Access Activity (Nigeria)
RCT	randomized control trial
REACH	Reading within Reach
RTI	RTI International
SEL	social and emotional learning
SSO	School Support Officer (Nigeria)
TLC	Teacher Learning Circles (Sierra Leone)
URC	University Research Co., LLC
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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This resource is one of several focused on consolidating research and experiences about best practices in early grade reading with the intention of supporting all stakeholders involved in designing, implementing or managing literacy programs. It was authored by Alison Pflepsen, Reading Program Specialist for Reading within Reach. Ashley C. Hertz, an independent consultant, provided technical guidance and contributions to the content. Benjamin Piper, Senior Director, Africa Education, RTI International; Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski, Associate Professor, Florida State University; and Tim Slade, Deputy Chief of Party - Operations, Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity, RTI International, provided helpful feedback on a draft version of this paper. Amy Pallangyo, REACH Technical Advisor, shared invaluable editorial assistance and feedback. John Micklos edited and Stephanie Pickett formatted the document.

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Introduction

As underscored in the new U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Education Policy, released in November 2018, the world faces a "chronic shortage of trained, qualified teachers" with the skills to improve student learning.[1] Enhancing teacher preparation and providing ongoing support to teachers in their classrooms is critically important to achieving global goals to improve the quality of education. These include the U.S. Government's and USAID's goal to provide primary age children equitable access to quality education, specifically by improving the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills in the early grades.[2]

Coaching is one strategy for providing teachers with the ongoing support they need to improve their instruction. Teacher educators commonly define coaching as "onsite, job-embedded, sustained professional development for teachers."[3] Through coaching, teachers receive continuous support to help them acquire and master new knowledge and skills to improve their instruction and, ultimately, student achievement.[4]

Coaching—also referred to as instructional coaching or pedagogical coaching—has been identified as an effective means of providing teacher professional development in many highly resourced contexts such as the United States.[5] This is due to consistent evidence that coaching, when combined with formal training, can have a greater impact on teacher change and student achievement than training alone.[6] Given the potential for coaching to facilitate teacher change and improve learning outcomes, many governments, donor agencies and organizations supporting early grade reading (EGR) improvement in low- and middle-income country (LMIC) contexts are increasingly incorporating coaching into their teacher professional development efforts.

USAID is one such agency whose primary grade reading improvement efforts have emphasized the importance of providing coaching to teachers.[7] Because USAID-supported efforts usually introduce new instructional methodologies and materials that differ significantly from the status quo, teachers need ongoing support to be successful. Therefore, coaching has potential to help teachers of reading adopt new evidence-based approaches and to integrate them into their practice to improve student achievement.

Since EGR programs in LMIC contexts increasingly include coaching as a component of in-service teacher professional development, it is important to take stock of existing evidence about its effectiveness and to understand experiences implementing coaching across countries. In doing so, EGR programs can learn from each other and identify gaps in knowledge that research, monitoring and evaluation can address. This stock-taking and reflection can also inform efforts to support improvement in primary grade numeracy and social and emotional learning (SEL).

1 USAID, 2018b

2 USG, 2018; USAID, 2018b

3 Bean, 2014, p. 7

4 Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018

5 For example, see Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017

6 For example, see Joyce & Showers, 2002

7 Information about USAID's work to support early grade reading can be found on the Global Reading Network website (www.globalreadingnetwork.net), in USAID reports (2016, 2018a), and in the new USAID Education Policy, 2018b

The purpose of this resource is twofold. First, it summarizes research on coaching and EGR program experiences so that the diverse stakeholders involved in designing and implementing coaching programs are better informed. Second, the resource provides guidance on key aspects of coaching, from coach support and training to monitoring and evaluation. It is designed to be informative and accessible to the diversity of organizations and individuals involved in the design, implementation, evaluation and scale up of EGR programs, as well as other efforts to improve teacher professional development.

This resource expands on the information provided by Bean (2014) in The power of coaching: Improving early grade reading instruction in developing countries by including additional experiences and lessons learned, as well as specific considerations and activities to be undertaken when planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating coaching activities. The content was informed by a review of existing literature on pedagogical coaching, early grade reading program coaching documents and conversations with individuals involved in coaching activities supported by USAID. It also grows out of the webinar and training module Coaching in early grade reading programs developed by REACH in collaboration with the GRN, which readers are encouraged to explore.[8]

The information is organized as follows:

Effectiveness of Coaching provides a brief overview of the effectiveness of coaching in improving teacher instruction and student outcomes by highlighting key research from both low- and high-resource contexts.

Coaching for Early Grade Reading Improvement: Research, Experience and Guidance summarizes key evidence and shares information and experiences from EGR programs' coaching efforts including: (1) coaching focus and approach; (2) recruiting effective coaches: knowledge, skills and characteristics; (3) coach roles and responsibilities; (4) coach preparation and support; and (5) frequency and duration of coaching. Throughout this section, readers will find textboxes describing coaching "examples from practice" from EGR programs. Critical learning questions are also highlighted to indicate where more evidence is needed about coaching in LMIC contexts.

Monitoring and Evaluating Coaching outlines important considerations and activities to undertake to assess coach performance. It includes examples of how some EGR programs have monitored, evaluated and conducted research on coaching, as well as additional ideas for gathering information on coaches and coaching activities, and assessing their impact.

Scale up and Sustainability of Coaching summarizes major factors to consider when designing and implementing coaching activities that will be implemented at a large scale, with the aim of integrating them into government education systems beyond the life of a project.

Conclusions and Future Directions for EGR Coaching highlights key issues discussed and areas for further study and attention by EGR programs.

At the end of this resource, **Annex 1: Planning and implementing coaching: Key activities, questions and considerations** is an action-oriented tool that EGR program teams can use to support the design, roll-out and expansion of coaching initiatives.

8 Pallangyo & Pflepsen, 2018

Effectiveness of Coaching

Many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of pedagogical coaching to improve teacher instruction and student outcomes, particularly in the areas of literacy and language learning. For example:

- A recent meta-analysis of 44 studies of diverse coaching programs from U.S. pre-K and primary literacy programs found that coaching is an effective means of improving teachers' instructional practices and student academic outcomes.[9]
- A longitudinal study on teacher coaching to support a large-scale reading reform effort in the U.S. found that teachers were more likely to change their instructional practices when they received information from a coach rather than from administrators or supervisors.[10]
- A study of early childhood education teachers in almost 300 locations in the U.S. found significant improvement in teachers' language and literacy instruction when they received coaching in addition to coursework, in comparison to teachers who received training only.[11]

In the context of early grade reading programs in low-income country contexts, evidence on the effectiveness of coaching is more limited,[12] though growing. Recent studies have found the following:

- A recent randomized control trial (RCT) in **South Africa** found that on-site pedagogical coaching as part of a structured learning program was more cost-effective in increasing students' reading comprehension skills than providing workshop-based training alone.[13]
- A study of literacy outcomes of more than 8,000 students in **Kenya** whose teachers received support from a coach found that teacher coaching can improve literacy outcomes in both public and non-formal education settings.[14]
- In **Nigeria,** a pilot early grade reading improvement program that included a coaching component resulted in an increase in the number of effective instructional practices teachers used, as well as an improvement in students' basic literacy skills.[15]

As noted above, evidence from both high- and low-resource environments suggests that coaching, when coupled with formal training, can be effective in improving teacher instruction and student outcomes. However, more and better research, monitoring and evaluation are needed to understand the impact of specific aspects of coaching on teacher practices and student outcomes, issues that are discussed in more detail throughout this resource. Critical questions to guide the EGR community of practice to learn more about what works and the effectiveness of coaching approaches and activities in a given context are included throughout the paper and in **Monitoring and Evaluating Coaching.**

The Current Coaching Landscape

While data on coaching in LMIC contexts is still somewhat limited, implementation of coaching has been underway in USAID-supported programs in a variety of countries for some time. **Figure 1** is an illustrative list of these coaching initiatives and select details about them. More information about the programs is described throughout this resource.

9 Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018. The studies included in the analysis were selected based on a research design that could support causal inference, e.g., randomized control trials.

10 Coburn & Woulfin, 2012

11 Neuman & Cunningham, 2009

12 Bean, 2014

13 Republic of South Africa Basic Education Department, 2017

14 Piper and Simmons Zuilkowski, 2015; Piper, Zuilkowski, Dubeck, Jepkemei & King, 2018

15 Pflepsen et al., under review; RTI International, 2016

FIGURE 1

Coaching in USAID early grade reading programs: An illustrative list of experiences

Program and Country	Description of coaching initiative
Ghana Partnership for Education: Learning (2014-2019)	The program is currently evaluating the effectiveness of using school-based coaches, Head Teachers and Curriculum Lead Teachers, who receive five days of training and are expected to observe the teachers at their school twice per month. These school-based coaches are supported by district-based coaches, who conduct less frequent visits. The program is also evaluating the effectiveness of a 10-minute and 30-minute teacher observation.
Ethiopia READ II (2018-2023)	The program supports individual coaching at the school level in the relevant mother tongue language. Coaching for teachers in grades 1-4 focuses on key skills development, while coaching in grades 5-8 focuses on applied literacy skills in informational and narrative reading contexts. A kit of "quick tools" supports coaches by providing recommendations for common teacher needs for literacy instruction.
Kenya Tusome (2015-2019) **Kenya PRIMR** (2011-2014)	Coaches are Curriculum Support Officers (CSO) employed by the government and supported by the project to visit schools. Coaches train teachers and are responsible for monthly visits to the teachers assigned to them (up to 45). Findings from the precursor to Tusome, PRIMR, suggest that increasing contact between classroom teachers and coaches is important to improving learning outcomes.
Read Liberia (2017-2022)	Coaches are assigned to visit teachers once per month, although the number of visits varies depending on teacher needs. To differentiate support to teachers, coaches use a classroom observation instrument to identify those in need of additional support.
Madagascar Mahay Mamaky Teny! (I can read!) (2018)	School directors served as coaches. They were responsible for helping teachers prepare for their lessons on a weekly basis and conducting teacher observations and conferences every two weeks. The pilot found that not all directors had the motivation or time to serve as coaches, while some teachers were interested in serving in the coach role. A "hybrid" approach to coach recruitment is being considered.
Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) (2014-2015)	An analysis of the impact of coaching on teacher practices during this one-year research initiative found that coaches who had more experience teaching as opposed to serving as a school administrator were more likely to provide effective coaching.

FIGURE 1 CONTINUED

Coaching in USAID early grade reading programs: An illustrative list of experiences

Program and Country	Description of coaching initiative
Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI) Plus (2015-2020)	Coaches, government personnel known as School Support Officers, receive 10 days of training (two specific to their role as coaches), participate in two refresher trainings and attend informal small-group meetings. Coaches are responsible for co-facilitating teacher training workshops, visiting individual teachers (twice per term), and organizing monthly "learning circles" with teachers from a cluster of neighboring schools.
Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) (2013-2020)	Coach observations serve a dual role of providing support to teachers and monitoring program implementation. Information is available within a month for review at the district, provincial and national levels on the project dashboard.
Philippines Basa Pilipinas (Read Philippines) (2013-2018)	Staff from local Departments of Education provided coaching support to teachers. Coaches recorded lesson observation information on tablets, which directed them to "tip sheets" to help them provide useful feedback to teachers.
Tanzania 21st Century Basic Education Program (TZ21) (2011-2013)	Coaches were government personnel known as School Inspectors, receiving 10 days of training (in two distinct sessions 6 months apart), quarterly refresher meetings held at regional levels. Coaches responsible for classroom visits and feedback, individual teacher mentoring, and school program evaluation with school principals (using a school performance guide for monitoring and reporting).

Coaching for Early Grade Reading Improvement: Research, Experience and Guidance

When coaching initiatives are designed in "deliberate ways to ensure consistent results,"[16] then investments are more likely to lead to positive change in teacher practices and student learning. To support program development and decision making, this section provides information about the following critical aspects of coaching:

- Coaching focus and approach;
- Recruiting effective coaches: Knowledge, skills and characteristics;
- Coach roles and responsibilities;
- Coach preparation and support; and
- Frequency and duration of coaching.

Each section includes: an overview of the topic; a summary of key research findings, as well as "key learning questions" for which more information is needed in EGR program contexts. Each section concludes with guidance for addressing issues related to the topic based on the evidence and experience to date.

Annex 1: Planning and implementing coaching: Key activities, questions and considerations is designed to assist those planning and implementing coaching initiatives by providing a list of key activities, questions and considerations related to the topics addressed in this section.

Coaching Focus and Approach

While the overarching goal of coaching is to improve teacher instruction and student outcomes, the focus of and specific approach to coaching varies depending on the objectives of a specific program and coaching activities, teacher skills and needs, coach capabilities and other contextual factors.[17] This section discusses the focus of coaching (e.g., what coaches and teachers spend their time doing) and coaching approaches that are most relevant to EGR programs in LMIC contexts.

Research findings

A recent meta-analysis of 44 studies in the U.S. found that coaching is more effective when it is content-specific or focused on a particular subject such as reading.[18] Other evidence suggests that in some situations, coaches may need to focus on topics such as instructional strategies, classroom management or differentiated instruction, since these issues can ultimately affect the quality of content instruction.[19] Such general instructional issues are particularly salient in many LMIC contexts where teachers are not adequately prepared to manage large classrooms with a variety of learner needs.

Evidence suggests that coaches should focus their guidance on how teachers can help their students.[20] A coach's approach to providing guidance can be situated

16 NIET, 2012, p. 4

17 Bean, 2014

18 Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018

19 Bean, 2009; Walpole et al., 2010; Walpole & McKenna, 2013, cited in Bean 2014.

20 L'Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010

on a continuum of "soft" to "hard," with one approach emphasized more than another depending on a given context, teacher or coach.[21] A "hard" or directive approach to coaching is focused on helping teachers to adopt a specific practice. It is often associated with efforts to help less experienced teachers to implement a new, structured program by monitoring their fidelity of implementation. In contrast, a "soft" or reflective approach to coaching aims to engage teachers in reflective inquiry about their practices. It is generally more feasible and appropriate with experienced and skilled teachers and coaches. However, these two approaches to coaching are not mutually exclusive. A "balanced" approach to coaching combines both elements, such as providing guidance on a new instructional practice while at the same time incorporating teachers' feedback and reflections.[22]

Experiences from EGR programs

In general, the purpose of coaching in EGR programs is to help teachers improve their abilities in reading instruction for children in grades 1 to 3. Therefore, coaching included in reading improvement initiatives primarily focuses on the following areas of reading instruction:

1. The reading skills that teachers should be teaching;
2. Teachers' instruction and assessment of key reading skills; and
3. Teachers' use of teaching and learning materials to support reading instruction.

A review of coaching programs and observation tools used by coaches indicates that most coaching efforts are focused on helping teachers adhere to a new reading program. These programs are quite structured in that they include guided lesson plans for teachers and specific instructional strategies and materials they are supposed to use. Coaches are responsible for verifying that teachers are following prescribed lesson plans and materials. In this respect, the focus of coaching is on fidelity of implementation of a new program, with the aim of helping teachers to improve their instruction. For example, in Kenya, coaches use a lesson observation tool that closely aligns with the elements of the lesson outlined in the teacher's guide.[23] The information coaches collect is then used by program staff and government education officials to monitor whether teachers are implementing the program as designed.

A more "balanced" approach to coaching can be found in some contexts, such as in Northern Nigeria, where coaches assess teachers' adherence to the program, but also ask teachers to reflect on the strengths of their lesson and what they think needs to be improved.[24]

Still, a review of several EGR program experiences indicates that coaches are mostly focused on fidelity of implementation. The attention to implementation fidelity may stem from a belief that both teachers and coaches lack the knowledge, skills and experience to engage in more reflective inquiry. It also may be a result of programs' need to gather monitoring data, and limited resources and personnel to do so. However, questions remain regarding the potential outcomes from coaching that is focused heavily on gathering program monitoring data: To what degree can coaches focus both on program monitoring and supporting teachers' growth and improved instruction? Is program monitoring the most cost-effective use of coaches' time, or might other personnel be engaged to gather such information, perhaps on a sample of teachers? Is coaching that does not encourage teacher reflection on practice likely to lead to changes in instruction and improvement in student outcomes?

If coaches are needed to conduct initial monitoring of fidelity of implementation, programs should consider how much information is needed to provide sufficient guidance. Additionally, they can identify a point in time or criteria for when coaches can shift their focus away from monitoring to support teachers' individual needs. Fi-

21 Bean, 2014

22 Bean, 2014; Ippolito, 2010

23 Piper, 2018

24 Creative Associates, 2016

nally, it's important for programs to support governments in identifying what approach to coaching is feasible, cost-effective and sustainable in the long-term.

Recommendations

Research and EGR experiences support several important recommendations on the design and implementation of coaching initiatives:

1. **Focus coaching on reading content and instruction.** Coaches' priority should be helping teachers to improve their early grade reading instruction. Because teachers' initial needs may be great, and coaches may not necessarily have acquired the knowledge and skills to provide effective feedback, programs should help coaches to identify priority issues to address.
2. **Consider a balanced approach and adapt the focus of coaching over time.** While focusing on teachers' fidelity of implementation may be needed initially, consider how coaches can also assist teachers to reflect on their own practices, needs and goals. The focus and approach to coaching can also evolve over time as teachers and coaches become more experienced.
3. **Tailor coach training and support to the specific focus and approach.** Provide tools, resources and training to coaches that reflect what they will be doing. (See **Coach preparation and support** on page 17 for more information on this topic.)
4. **Monitor and evaluate the focus and approach to coaching.** Assess the outcomes and impact of a particular approach to coaching: document what coaches do; the successes, challenges and limitations encountered by coaches and the program implementing a particular approach; and the impact of the approach on teacher instruction and student learning.

Recruiting Effective Coaches: Knowledge, Skills and Characteristics

To be effective, instructional coaches need to have certain knowledge, skills and characteristics. In well-resourced contexts, coaches are usually required to obtain specific academic credentials as well as have a certain level of experience. In many LMIC contexts, opportunities to acquire the relevant academic qualifications or credentials (e.g., a degree or certificate in literacy) may not even exist, while opportunities to gain relevant experience—such as teaching early grade reading—may also not be available. Moreover, in contexts where instructional coaching is new, stakeholders may think that anyone can easily serve as a coach. As coaching programs become more common in LMIC contexts, it is important to understand what knowledge and skills coaches need to be effective coach so that personnel with these attributes can be recruited, and so that coaches without such qualifications can receive the training and support needed.

CRITICAL LEARNING QUESTIONS FOR EGR PROGRAMS

Coach knowledge, skills and characteristics

- What coach knowledge, skills and characteristics lead to effective coaching?
- What is the quality of coaching provided, and how and why does it change over time?
- What is the relationship between the quality of coaching and improvement in teachers' instruction?

Key research findings

Researchers and practitioners commonly agree that specific knowledge and skills are essential for coaches to effectively do their job (see **Figure 2**). These include knowledge of literacy skills and instruction, experience teaching and strong interpersonal skills.

While specific knowledge of early grade reading pedagogy, instruction and assessment is critical, coaches also need to learn "soft skills" to be effective. In one study of literacy coaches, teachers consistently cited "trust and confidentiality" as essential elements

FIGURE 2

Knowledge and skills essential for effective coaching

- Knowledge of literacy and language development, as well as knowledge of instruction and assessment
- Experience teaching (effectively) at the same grade level they are coaching
- Experience working with teachers or providing professional development
- Understanding of the coaching process (e.g., how to observe, model, discuss with teachers)
- Understanding of adult learning
- Strong interpersonal, leadership and communication skills
- Ability to develop a trusting relationship with teachers and to work well with them
- Disposition suited for coaching (e.g. approachable, understanding of coach role)

Drawn from Bean, 2014; International Reading Association, 2004, 2010; L'Allier et al., 2010

FIGURE 3

Developing positive rapport with teachers

To be effective in their role, coaches need to develop a positive rapport with teachers, something that may not necessarily come naturally to some coaches, particularly if they have previously assumed an inspector role within the education system. Coaches can build trust by clearly communicating to teachers they are collaborators to support their professional development; maintaining confidentiality; asking and answering teachers' questions; and utilizing language that is respectful of the teacher. As such, time should be spent preparing both teachers and coaches for engaging in a collaborative relationship. This includes reviewing with both teachers and coaches what coaches will be doing (and should not be doing) during a coach visit; outlining expectations for appropriate conduct; and helping teachers and coaches to understand the value of coaching. Cultural dynamics or other issues that may influence how coaches and teachers view each other and interact should also be addressed.

of effective coaching.[25] In another study conducted in Sierra Leone, coaches self-reported that in addition to the knowledge about early grade reading instruction, coaches also needed to have a "willingness to learn" and a "love and commitment for the work" to do their job properly.[26] **Figure 3** describes the importance of coaches developing a positive rapport with teachers.

Experience in EGR programs further indicates that coaches also need to possess a *disposition* suitable for coaching. This means being approachable, understanding the coach role, willing to meet challenges and having an interest in reading improvement.[27]

In the context of EGR programs in low-income contexts, limited evidence exists regarding the specific profile of effective coaches. However, regardless of the context, the core knowledge and skills required for coaches to be effective are not likely to be radically different.

Recent research from Nigeria, for example, aligns with existing evidence on the importance of coaches' classroom experience, as opposed to their experience in administration. The study found a positive relationship between teachers' instructional practices and the number of years a coach spent teaching and serving as a School Support Officer (SSO), a position which

25 L'Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010

26 Hertz, 2017

27 Bean, 2014

A coach in Madagascar training teachers. *Credit: Elmine Ranorovololona, FHI 360*

includes visiting schools and supporting teachers.[28] The research also found that coaches who have more experience teaching as opposed to serving as a school administrator were more likely to provide effective coaching.

Experiences in EGR programs

In contexts where early grade reading programs are new and the concept of an instructional coach not well established within the educational system, personnel with the knowledge, skills and experience normally required of coaches do not usually exist. In such cases, EGR programs need to either recruit coaches from outside the system or work to re-orient and provide professional development to existing education sector personnel. Ideally, these people would have some previous teaching experience and experience supporting teachers.

The first option, hiring individuals outside the education system, has been utilized in early grade reading improvement efforts in conflict-affected countries including Liberia (through the USAID-supported EGRA Plus pilot) and Sierra Leone (through the Department for International Development [DFID]-supported RaISES project), two countries which experienced personnel shortages,[29] as well as in private schools in poor urban areas of Kenya.[30] While recruiting coaches from outside the education system may be a necessity in certain contexts, such a model poses challenges related to cost, scale up and sustainability for most countries because governments are unlikely to be able to add to their budgets the cost of hiring coaches on a national scale.

The second option, which is more common across current early grade reading improvement efforts, involves identifying existing personnel within the system to serve as coaches, even if they do not currently have the ideal qualifications and experience, and then training them on essential knowledge and skills. For example, in Northern Nigeria, government School Support Officers (SSOs) have been identified to serve as coaches because they already were responsible for visiting schools.[31] In Kenya, Community Support Officers (formerly known as TAC Tutors) were designated to serve as coaches because of their existing responsibility to support teachers.[32] In Senegal as part of the Lecture Pour Tous (All Children Reading) program, government school inspectors have been identified to serve as coaches, in addition to school directors. In all of these contexts, the government personnel identified to serve as coaches did not, broadly speaking, have the skills, qualifications and experience typically expected of a reading coach.

While many EGR programs use personnel not based in schools to serve as coaches, several programs are assessing the feasibility of using school-based staff. This is due to several factors, including an insufficient number of non-school-based personnel to regularly visit teachers, the cost of school visits, and/or competing responsibilities of the non-school-based staff. For example:

- In **Ghana,** the USAID-supported Learning program is currently evaluating the effectiveness of using school-based coaches, namely Head Teachers (e.g., principals) and Curriculum Lead Teachers. These individuals will in turn be supported by district-based

28 Harden, Pflepsen & King, 2018

29 Korda and Piper, 2013; Hertz, 2017

30 Piper and Zuilkowski, 2015

31 RTI International, 2016; Creative Associates, 2016

32 Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015

33 Miksic, personal communication, 2018; FHI 360, 2017a; FHI 360, 2017b

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 1

Using school directors as coaches: An experience from Madagascar

In Madagascar, the USAID-supported Mahay Mamaky Teny! (I know how to read!) early grade reading program piloted an approach of utilizing school directors as coaches, locally referred to as mentors. The directors were responsible for helping teachers prepare for their lessons on a weekly basis and conducting teacher observations and conferences every two week.

Results from the pilot identified several lessons learned and potential modifications for expanding coaching/mentoring efforts. First, the pilot found that school directors' multiple responsibilities limited the amount of time they had to support teachers. Other factors that influenced a director's availability to coach included whether the director had a deputy who could share responsibilities, and directors' motivation to take on the additional role of a coach.

Reflecting on the pilot experience, government officials in Madagascar concluded that different coaching models may be needed depending on school size, whether the director has a deputy, and whether the director wants to take on the role of coach. The pilot also found that some teachers expressed an interest in coaching. The government recognized that for coaching/mentoring to happen regularly, whoever assumes the role of coach needs to have some of their other responsibilities reduced. Discussions are currently ongoing as to how to potentially implement a multifaceted approach.

Sources: FHI 360, 2018a; Louge, personal communication, 2018

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 2

Considering context: Identifying coaches in Senegal

In Senegal, the USAID-supported Lecture Pour Tous (All Children Reading) program is assessing the feasibility, scalability and effectiveness of an approach to coaching developed in collaboration with the ministry of education. Due to the limited number of government education inspectors available to visit teachers, school directors serve as teachers' primary coaches. Inspectors play a complementary role in both supporting school directors in their role as coaches and coaching school directors who are themselves early grade reading teachers. In addition to providing pedagogical support to teachers, both school directors and inspectors assess and monitor student reading skills. This approach to coaching aligns with existing policy to support teacher peer-learning and professional development at the school level.

Source: Swift-Morgan, Chemonics, 2018

support teachers, who will conduct less frequent coaching visits.[33]

- In **Madagascar,** the Mahay Mamaky Teny! ("I know how to read!") early grade reading pilot used school directors as "mentors," or coaches.[34] The pilot found that, although some school directors are motivated and interested in serving as coaches, tapping other personnel, such as teachers, may be necessary in some schools. More findings from the pilot can be found in **Example from practice 1.**
- In **Senegal,** the Lecture Pour Tous program is assessing the feasibility and effectiveness of using both school directors and inspectors for coaching. The inspectors' primary role is to "coach the coaches," although some directly coach teachers if the school director is also an early grade reading teacher (ap-

34 EDC, 2018a

proximately 20 percent of school directors) and thus needs coaching support as well. See **Example from practice 2** for more details on coaching in Senegal.

Recommendations

While most early grade reading programs are faced with challenges recruiting coaches who have the qualifications, knowledge and skills traditionally required for coaches, the guidance below can help programs to identify and train people who are most likely to be successful:

1. **Educate stakeholders about the knowledge and skills coaches need to have.** This will help to as coaches, for training and supporting them, and for identifying ways in which coaches can obtain the necessary qualifications to perform their jobs effectively.
2. **Identify coaches from within the government.** Tap existing government personnel to serve as coaches—ideally staff who are responsible for visiting schools and/or providing support to teachers. This strategy is more feasible than hiring external coaches and supports scale up and sustainability of coaching.
3. **Identify personnel most likely to have necessary skills and experience.** In some situations, programs may be able to choose from among a pool of potential coaches. As programs become more established, personnel who serve as coaches can also be selected based on these criteria.
4. **Consider using different groups of people to provide coaching support.** Depending on the personnel available and interested in serving as coaches, recruit a variety of personnel to serve as coaches. This may result in a hybrid approach where different individuals—principals, teachers and others—may serve as coaches, depending on the school.
5. **Consider using qualified coaches from outside the system on a short-term basis.** If qualified coaches do not exist within the government system, consider hiring external personnel on a short-term basis to model and evaluate quality coaching. Phase out this external, project-funded support once it is no longer needed to support sustainability.
6. **Develop EGR and coaching certification programs.** As early grade reading improvement efforts become more established in a country's education system, countries should consider providing opportunities for coaches to obtain formal credentials or certifications in early grade reading. Such efforts, while not yet targeted to coaches specifically, have been developed in countries including Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda.
7. **Conduct context-specific research on coach characteristics, qualifications and experience.** More research is needed to identify the characteristics, qualifications and experience that coaches need to be effective.

Coach Roles and Responsibilities

The primary role of a coach is to provide on-going professional development and support to teachers to help them improve their classroom instruction—and ultimately student outcomes.[35] The role of a coach is different from that of a supervisor or inspector, as outlined in Figure 4, which summarizes activities commonly conducted by coaches and by school supervisors.

At times and in some contexts, activities conducted by coaches and supervisors may be similar. For example, both a coach and a supervisor might check whether the school director is present, verify whether a teacher has the day's lesson plan, and count how many students are in attendance.

However, it's important to make a distinction between how and why these activities are conducted depending on the person's role during the school visit: that of a coach or that of a supervisor. The purpose of a coach's school visit is to understand teachers' needs and to provide them with individualized support to improve their instruction.

Supervisors, on the other hand, typically visit schools to verify compliance or to evaluate the performance of teachers and school personnel. Importantly, a supervisor carrying out the same activities as a coach has the authority to compel a teacher or director to do some-

35 IRA, 2004

FIGURE 4

Roles and responsibilities of coaches versus supervisors

Coaches	Supervisors
While the activities an individual coach conducts will vary depending on a program's goals, the coach's skill level and a teacher's needs, support is focused on teacher practices in the classroom. Common activities include the following: ▶ Observe teacher's lesson delivery ▶ Co-plan and/or co-teach a lesson ▶ Model instructional practices ▶ Demonstrate how to use or make instructional materials ▶ Assess students' literacy skills, or help teachers to do so and identify how results can inform instruction ▶ Discuss challenges or problems and identifying potential solutions ▶ Train teachers and provide professional development opportunities, either in a formal workshop setting or in small groups	In contrast to the teacher-focused activities conducted by coaches, school supervisors are likely to engage in the following activities, focused at the school level: ▶ Verify required documentation is available at the school (e.g., enrollment register) ▶ Verify school enrollment ▶ Verify teachers have a lesson plan—but do not co-plan or co-teach a lesson ▶ Verify teachers and school director are in attendance ▶ Discuss with school leadership management-related issues ▶ Visit a classroom, usually briefly, to see teachers at work ▶ Gather data from (sampled) classrooms to inform program implementation

thing, and potentially to carry out disciplinary actions or sanctions. A coach does not—and should not—have this authority.

Given that supervisors are sometimes identified to serve as coaches—and may retain their position and authority as supervisors—the above distinctions are important to understand and to communicate to coaches as they transition to a new role or continue to carry out two different ones.

Key research findings

Evidence from both high- and low-income country contexts indicates the importance of focusing coaches' role on supporting teachers as opposed to administrative duties.[36] For example, a longitudinal study on coaching conducted as part of a large-scale reading reform effort in the U.S. found that teachers were more likely to change their instructional practices when they received information from a coach rather than from administrators or supervisors. This was because coaches had more time with teachers and helped them make specific changes in their classroom practices.[37]

Similarly, emerging evidence in Malawi comparing coaching across two different programs indicates that the absence of administrative duties among some

36 L'Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010

37 Coburn & Woulfin, 2012

38 Slade & Wambari, 2017

CRITICAL LEARNING QUESTIONS FOR EGR PROGRAMS

Coach roles and responsibilities

- What roles and responsibilities are feasible for coaches to conduct well?
- What coaching activities are most cost-effective in improving teacher instruction and student outcomes?

coaches may be partially responsible for those coaches conducting more teacher observations than coaches who do have administrative duties, though further research is needed.[38]

In terms of specific coaching activities, research suggests that:

- One-to-one coaching is a significant predictor of student learning;[39]
- Coach responsibilities like observation, co-teaching, modeling, feedback and relationship-building can positively influence teacher practice;[40] and
- Coaching groups of teachers can be an efficient and effective way to support multiple teachers at the same time.[41]

Studies also have found that coaches' responsibilities and the specific activities they engage in with teachers will vary depending on the needs of individual teachers. They also will likely change over time.[42] For example, during the initial stages of a new program, coaches might first be focused on establishing their relationship with the teacher. Their responsibilities may be targeted toward verifying whether teachers are implementing new practices at all. Over time, their efforts might be focused on more collaborative activities and "intense" activities, such as co-planning or modeling a lesson.[43]

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 3

Coach-conducted student assessment

Across EGR programs, coaches are assessing students in different ways. In Kenya, during each classroom visit coaches randomly select three students to assess key reading skills, using a standardized assessment instrument. In early grade reading programs supported by the organization Room to Read, coaches conduct a more informal assessment of student learning and use the information as a springboard for providing guidance to teachers. For example, during a visit to a school, coaches informally assess five students by asking each child to read from the student book. Coupled with information the teacher may share about how well students are performing, these informal assessments are designed to be a quick "temperature check" to inform coach feedback and discussion with the teacher, based on students' needs.

Source: Thompsen, personal communication, 2018

Experiences from EGR programs

A review of several EGR coaching initiatives in low-income country contexts indicates that coaches' primary role is to monitor teachers' instruction vis-à-vis program parameters (e.g., fidelity of implementation) and to provide feedback to help teachers improve their practices. Common responsibilities related to this include:

- Visiting schools to observe teachers' instruction;
- Recording information about teacher practices on a standardized observation instrument (sometimes pro-

39 Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007, 2011; Scott et al., 2012

40 Scott et al., 2012; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; NCSI, 2014

41 National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2012

42 Walpole & McKenna, 2013

43 IRA, 2004; Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen & Zigmond, 2010

A coach observes a teacher as part of the Nigeria RARA research study. *Credit: RTI International*

vided on a hand-held tablet or mobile phone, so data can be transmitted and analyzed as part of program monitoring and evaluation); and

- Providing feedback to teachers on how to improve their instruction.

Coach visits usually include a specific protocol of activities to conduct before and after the visit, and a lesson or classroom observation form to guide their observations (more details on resources for coaches can be found in the section **Coach preparation and support** on page 17).

In some programs, coaches also assess learners' reading skills, either informally or formally. The purpose of this assessment is to be able to provide more targeted feedback to teachers about how to adjust their instruction to meet learners' needs. See the **Example from practice 3** for information about different approaches to coach-conducted student assessment.

Oftentimes, coaches are also responsible for training teachers in formal workshop settings. This is the case for the Nigeria Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+), which engages master trainers from teacher training colleges to train coaches, who then co-facilitate teacher training workshops.

In several EGR programs, in addition to providing one-on-one coaching, coaches facilitate period small-group meetings with teachers to provide them with opportunities for peer learning and professional development on specific topics. Results have varied. For example:

- In **Sierra Leone,** coaches established Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs) at each school where teachers met monthly to discuss different topics related to reading instruction, problem-solve challenges and identify personal improvement goals. Coaches modeled facilitation of the TLCs (using a

44 Hertz, 2017. The coaches were part of the DFID-supported Rebuilding and Improving Schools in Sierra Leone after Ebola (RaISES) project.

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 4

From supervisor to coach in Northern Nigeria

Monitoring of coaches participating in the Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) in Northern Nigeria found that many new EGR coaches—who were government School Support Officers (SSOs)—had a difficult time adjusting to their new role, which contrasted with their previous one that focused more on school inspection. Coaches faced challenges establishing a positive rapport with teachers and engaging in a collaborative relationship with them. To identify specific problems coaches had establishing a collegial relationship with teachers, the program team gathered data on coach-teacher interactions using an observation protocol. Information gathered included whether coaches treated teachers in a friendly or respectful manner, asked teachers for input, listened to what teachers had to say and provided opportunities for teachers to ask questions. The data were analyzed and used to identify areas for ongoing professional development for coaches. Findings also were shared with coaches during as part of their ongoing professional development.

Source: Pflepsen, Harden & Sankey, 2016

guide to support them) until teachers were able to facilitate and lead themselves. Coaches found TLCs to be a promising approach that helped both them and the teachers to better understand the foundations of literacy, to better adapt to the context, and problem solve challenges they were having. They also saw it as a more sustainable option than coaching alone.[44]

- In **Northern Nigeria,** coaches are responsible for organizing monthly meetings with teachers from a cluster of neighboring schools. These one-day meetings are designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to share experiences and to engage in "mini" professional development sessions with the coach.[45] While a pilot version of this approach found that coaches and teachers appreciated an opportunity to come together,[46] as the program, NEI Plus, has grown in scale these meetings do not happen regularly due to challenges including lack of transportation, poor communication with teachers and lack of commitment on the part of some coaches.[47]
- In **Ghana,** coaches—school principals and lead teachers based at the schools—are responsible for organizing weekly school-based in-service training sessions to discuss various reading skills and practical strategies for improving teachers' instruction.[48] The project, Ghana Learning, is currently monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of assigning coaching responsibilities to school personnel.

As indicated in the above examples, coach-facilitated professional development for small groups of teachers is provided in addition to, and not as a substitute for, individualized classroom-based coaching. Moreover, evidence is still needed regarding its effectiveness in specific contexts.

Experiences across several EGR improvement programs suggest that in some contexts, coaches have struggled to perform their roles and responsibilities as expected by the program, particularly in the early stages of implementation.[49] Factors that influence their ability to perform their roles and responsibilities include:

- **Lack of understanding among coaches regarding their role,** and challenges adapting to it, especially in contexts where those serving as coaches used to, or concurrently, play some supervisory role

45 Creative Associates International, 2016

46 RTI International, 2016

47 Creative Associates International, 2018; Yusuf, & Inuwa, personal communication, 2018

48 FHI 360, 2017a

49 Hertz, 2017; Pflepsen, Harden & Sankey, 2016; Yusuf & Inuwa, personal communication, 2018; Slade, personal communication, 2018

(see **Example from practice 4**);

- **Coach characteristics and capacity,** primarily a lack of knowledge about early grade reading instruction and experience as a coach;
- **Contextual factors** including distance to schools, road conditions, lack of government funds (or disbursement of them) to pay for transportation and a high coach-teacher ratio; and
- **Lack of commitment** among some coaches, local education officials and the support of the education system overall in supporting teachers at the school level.

To the extent possible, these challenges need to be addressed during the design stage of a coaching initiative.

Recommendations

Based on EGR program experiences and available evidence to date, programs are encouraged to consider the following recommendations when identifying coach roles and responsibilities:

1. **Consider coaches' abilities and assign responsibilities accordingly.** Expectations about what coaches should be able to do should align with their knowledge and skills. To avoid overwhelming new coaches—and potentially creating a situation where they are neither able nor willing to carry out their role well—consider scaffolding their responsibilities.
2. **Codify and communicate coach roles and responsibilities.** A written description of coach roles and responsibilities must be embedded in the job description of those serving as coaches. Coaches need to be informed of, and clearly understand, their roles and responsibilities to be able to carry them out as intended. Coaches who recently or concurrently serve in a supervisory role need to understand how their role as a coach differs from that of a supervisor. They in turn need to clearly communicate the purpose of their school visits to directors and teachers.
3. **Identify potential challenges to coaches carrying out their responsibilities.** Once these have been identified, engage in a collaborative process with stakeholders to identify how they can be mitigated. Adjust responsibilities in situations where a challenge might not be able to be addressed.
4. **Adapt coaching roles and responsibilities to teacher needs.** While most teachers are likely to need a significant amount of support during the initial stages of implementing a new instructional approach, programs should explore how coaches can differentiate the type and level of support they provide teachers.
5. **Pilot different coach roles and responsibilities and assess cost effectiveness.** Since the ideal coach roles and responsibilities may not be apparent even if the above actions are undertaken, pilot different approaches. Embed the pilot into a program's overall monitoring, evaluation and research plan to identify the impact of specific coach activities.

CRITICAL LEARNING QUESTIONS FOR EGR PROGRAMS

Coach preparation and support

- What approaches to coach training and support (modalities and content) result in effective coaches?
- What is the most cost-effective, sustainable way to prepare and support coaches for a specific context?
- What resources best support coaches in implementing effective coaching with positive impact on teacher practice?

Coach Preparation and Support

Regardless of the context, coaches need training, resources and on-going support to be effective. Since most coaches in early grade reading programs in LMIC contexts typically do not have the prerequisite knowledge, skills and experience related to early grade reading instruction providing coaches with professional development opportunities and appropriate support tools is essential. This section describes different ways in which coaches can be trained, what resources can be helpful in providing them with sup-

50 Hertz, 2017

FIGURE 5

Coach preparation and support: DOs and DON'Ts

DO....	DO NOT....
▶ Provide multiple and sustained opportunities for training	▶ Provide one-off training
▶ Focus on the reading program content, instructional strategies and materials that teachers are expected to use	▶ Focus only on the reading program content, instructional strategies, and materials
▶ Focus on the processes and tools that coaches should utilize	▶ Focus only on the processes and tools of coaching
▶ Focus on content that improves teachers' knowledge and skills	▶ Train coaches only in the theory of coaching
▶ Focus on practices that improve teachers' knowledge and instruction	▶ Provide shorter training than that provided to teachers
▶ Provide multiple and sustained opportunities for coaches to apply what they are learning	▶ Ignore best practices for adult learning
▶ Work within the government structure and system to train coaches (to support sustainability)	▶ Work outside the government structure and system to train coaches (not sustainable)
▶ Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection during practice settings and during implementation of coaching	▶ Train coaches to use structures or processes that are outside of the normal function of the school day
▶ Honor research-based principles for adult learning (e.g., active learning, peer collaboration, modelling and coaching)	▶ Ignore the practical and logistical aspects of coaching implementation during training
▶ Train coaches on logistical aspects of coaching	
▶ Provide a variety of implementation and data collection tools, with support to learn how to use them	

port, and how coaches can be provided with continuous professional development.

Key research findings

While limited research exists in both low-income and high-income contexts on how to best prepare and support coaches,[50] professional development for coaches should exhibit the same characteristics that have been identified as being effective for teacher professional development. These include the recommendations in **Figure 5** for preparing coaches (as well as what not to do).

In the context of EGR programs, research on the effec-

51 Hertz, 2017

FIGURE 6

Topics for coach preparation and support

Early grade learning topics	Coach-specific topics
▶ Rationale, goals and objectives of the EGR improvement initiative	▶ Coach roles and responsibilities
▶ Why early grade reading is important	▶ Conducting an effective coaching visit and observing a lesson
▶ EGR skills and developmental progression	▶ Providing constructive feedback and guidance to teachers
▶ Effective instructional strategies for teaching EGR skills	▶ Building trust and positive rapport with teachers
▶ How to effectively use EGR teaching and learning materials	▶ Effective communication and interpersonal skills
▶ How to conduct and use formative assessment in EGR programs, and how to use results to inform instruction	▶ Principles of adult and peer learning
▶ Strategies for providing gender equitable, inclusive instruction for diverse learners	▶ How to use coach-related tools and resources
▶ Classroom management practices to support effective instruction	▶ Coach visit schedule and logistics (e.g., transportation t, activities to conduct and tools to use)
	▶ **If coaches serve as teacher trainers:** How to train teachers on an EGR program

tiveness of different approaches or modalities of coach training is limited. One small-scale study in Sierra Leone explored coaches' perspectives of their own experiences and professional learning while participating in an EGR program funded by the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID).[51] The coaches, who had limited prerequisite skills and knowledge, articulated the importance of learning about their role, including new pedagogical and content knowledge related to early grade reading; teaching and learning at the primary level; and how the coaching role differs from a supervisory role. The research also found that coaches valued competency-driven professional development; multiple opportunities to learn; and peer collaboration through coaches' learning circles, practice and feedback.

Lastly, the research found that the coaches appreciated having specific resources, models, frameworks and tools to support their learning and their work. These included information about the coaching cycle nd steps as well as the adult learning cycle. This information provided them with guidance on what was expected of them as coaches and helped them work towards common, shared goals.

Experiences from EGR programs

Training for coaches needs to provide coaches with information and opportunities to learn the skills they need to be an effective coach. A list of training topics commonly found in EGR programs' coach training activities is listed in **Figure 6.**

EGR programs currently employ various approaches to coach preparation and training. Common across programs is initial training to orient coaches to their role, which usually takes place in a formal workshop setting over several days, ranging from three to 12 among several programs surveyed, with approximately five days on average. During this time, coaches learn about early grade reading pedagogy, become familiar with teaching and learning materials, and learn about their roles and responsibilities. They also receive training on using classroom observation tools, how to record information on paper and/or tablets, how to provide feedback to teachers and other logistics associated with school visits. Follow-up training (of one or two days) also is provided,

usually in the form of a formal workshop.

Often, coaches participate in the same training that teachers receive, since they need to learn everything that the teachers are learning, as well about the EGR program. In other cases, coaches are trained separately from teachers, and may even be responsible for training them.

The recent Madagascar early grade reading pilot Mahay Mamaky Teny! (I can read!) identified several "best practices" for training coaches, known locally as mentors. These include: (1) the importance of alignment and coherence of coach training modules with the strategies and content embedded in the teaching and learning materials; (2) the importance of maintaining a balance between theory and practice in the trainings; (3) modeling the coaching approach in the training; and (4) including mentors in the teacher training so they are familiar with the instructional strategies and materials being used in the program.[52]

Other potentially effective modalities for providing professional development opportunities for coaches include small-group meetings or "learning circles," such as those organized by EGR programs in Northern Nigeria and Sierra Leone.[53] Such meetings involve a small number of coaches who come together to share experiences, get feedback from peers as well as more experienced personnel, and receive additional training and support as needed. In Nigeria, under the RARA pilot reading program, staff and coaches both reported that they appreciated these check-in meetings and found them to be effective in providing targeted support to coaches.[54]

In South Africa, the government is currently testing the cost-effectiveness of providing "virtual" or distance coaching to teachers. Initial findings indicate the approach is equally as effective as in-person coaching, slightly less expensive, and enables one coach to support nearly four times as many teachers.[55] See **Example from practice 5** for more details about this initiative the research results.

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 5

Supporting teachers from a distance: Virtual coaching in South Africa

In South Africa, as in many LMIC contexts, the pool of qualified coaches is limited. To address this challenge, the South African Department of Basic Education is evaluating the use of technology to expand the reach of an individual coach. To do so, one group of teachers is receiving paper-based resources and on-site coaching, while a second group is receiving tablet-based resources and virtual coaching. Each coach is responsible for providing virtual support to 90 teachers, compared to a ratio of in-person coaching support of 1:15. Virtual coaching includes daily WhatsApp messages related to instruction and encouragement; regular phone calls; monitoring through photo and video; and digital support communities through WhatsApp, facilitated by the coach. The study aims to compare the impact and cost-effectiveness of the two modes of coaching over three years. After the first year, the study found significant improvement in student learning outcomes for teachers receiving both in-person and virtual coaching. However, the ICT-based coaching is $5 less expensive per child per year than the non-ICT-based coaching.

Source: Kotze, J., Fleich, B. & Taylor, S., 2018

Lastly, coaches might also receive support at the school level from a more knowledgeable individual (e.g., "master coach" or "coach of the coach"). More information on this form of support to coaches is provided in the section **Monitoring and Evaluating Coaching.**

52 FHI 360, 2018a. Madagascar coach training materials can be found in FHI 360, 2018b and FHI 360, 2018c.

53 RTI International, 2016; Hertz, 2017

54 RTI International, 2016

55 Kotze, Fleisch, & Taylor, 2018

56 Hertz, 2017; Pflepsen, Harden & Sankey, 2016

A coach in Sokoto state, Nigeria, trains teachers on a new reading initiative. *Credit: Adejumobi Adegbite, Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI) Plus, Creative Associates*

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 6

Using diverse methods to train and support coaches

Through the USAID-supported Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI) Plus program, coaches have multiple opportunities for professional development. They first participate in a 10-day training that includes two days specific to coaching. During the year, coaches also participate in more informal one-day professional development meetings, which include a small number of coaches getting together to discuss their experiences, get feedback, review data gathered during teacher observations and learn about a particular topic.

Source: Creative Associates International, 2016

Experience across EGR programs has found that a few days of formal training are insufficient for creating a quality cadre of coaches, particularly in contexts where most of those recruited to serve as coaches have little to no background on early grade reading or how to support teachers.[56] Rather, coaches need multiple and diverse opportunities over time to consolidate and apply what they are learning. See **Example from practice 6** from the Northern Nigeria Education Initiative (NEI) Plus, where coaches are provided with multiple opportunities for professional development.

Recent EGR program experiences also have found that scaffolding and staggering training can be helpful. For example, coaches participating in the Nigeria RARA pilot reading program took part in two formal trainings during the school year. Later, in a separate training, they learned how to collect classroom observation data using a hand-held tablet. Two coach "check-in meetings" organized later in the year to share experiences and learn about specific topics further helped to stagger

57 RTI International, 2016

58 For example, see Creative Associates International, 2016 (Nigeria); FHI 360, 2017b (Ghana); FHI 360, 3018b (Madagascar)

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 7

Resources and tools to support coaching: Examples from the Philippines

In the Philippines, the USAID-supported Basa Pilipinas project collaborated with the Department of Education to develop tools and procedures to support supervision staff from local Departments of Education to observe and provide support to teachers. During visits, teachers fill out a pre-observation survey and information about the lesson they will be teaching. The observer and the teacher discuss the teacher's survey information before the lesson. The coach then records the lesson observation on a tablet using an app, which also directs teachers and coaches to "tip sheets" related to the areas in need of additional support. Teachers have expressed appreciation of this approach and the feedback the tool helps to provide.

Source: EDC, GRN survey on classroom observation, 2018

and scaffold coaches' learning on additional topics.[57]

To support their training and their work, coaches need appropriate and useful tools and resources. These commonly include:

- **Written packet of information** outlining their roles and responsibilities, how to be an effective coach, and logistics associated with coaching. This resource is typically provided during training.[58]
- **Copies of teaching and learning materials** so they are familiar with program resources and can use them with teachers during coaching
- **Classroom observation tools** to guide coaches in their observations of teacher lesson delivery. The content of these tools is usually closely aligned

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 8

Tablets to support coaches and coaching

Tablets are used in many EGR programs to support coaches and coaching. This includes using them to: monitor coach visits; provide coaches with resources, including classroom observation tools; and suggest ideas for feedback to teachers.

For example, in Kenya, handheld tablets provided to coaches (through the USAID-supported Tusome project) include electronic versions of the teacher guides and student books, videos with demonstration lessons and an app that allows them to hear letter sounds. Program implementers say this resource has been particularly popular. A classroom observation tool loaded onto the tablets guides coaches in their review of a teacher's lesson. Coaches record information about the observation into the tablet, then upload it to be reviewed by the project staff and county government officials. (For more information on the Kenya coaching "dashboard," see Kipp et al., 2018.) The data include the date and time of their visits with teachers, as well as the GPS coordinates of the school, which is then used to verify whether a coach should be reimbursed for transportation to the school.

Despite the widespread use of tablets, however, several programs report that their use is not currently sustainable by the government due to the cost of IT hardware and maintenance, lack of technical expertise to manage a dashboard, insufficient local expertise to conduct data analysis and/or lack of political will to apply findings.

59 Hertz, Kochetkova & Pflepsen, 2018

with a guided lesson plan the teacher is expected to use and serves as a "checklist" for coaches while they observe a lesson. The information is also frequently used by project staff and government personnel to monitor whether coaches visit schools, as well as to monitor teacher instruction. The length and format of these tools varies. See **Example from practice 7** about coaching tools and processes in the Philippines. The REACH/GRN resource Classroom observation toolkit for early grade reading improvement provides detailed information and explicit guidance on the development and use of coach classroom observation instruments.[59]

- In many programs, classroom observation tools are frequently provided to coaches on a **hand-held tablet.** Once the coach completes the observation, the tablets may also be programmed to provide **guidance to the coach on feedback to give to the teacher.** Tablet-based observations also allow coaches to share data with project and government personnel, which allows them to monitor whether coaches visited assigned schools as planned. The data can also be used to inform ongoing teacher professional development. Sometimes, tablets contain other resources for the coach, including the program's **teaching and learning materials.** The Ghana Learning, Kenya Tusome, Liberia READ and Malawi MERIT programs, for example, all provide tablets to coaches (see **Example from practice 8** for more information on coach use of tablets).
- A **coach feedback form** is sometimes included as part of a classroom observation tool. The purpose of the tool is to help the coach identify key areas of feedback to guide the post-lesson observation discussion with the teacher. It is also used to record an "action plan" for the teacher. (In some cases, a carbon copy duplicate of the feedback form may be provided to the teacher to refer to between coach visits.)
- **Student assessment protocols or tools** are also sometimes provided to coaches. These range from formal (e.g., pre-determined list of letters, words or sentences that the child reads while the coach records their responses) to informal (e.g., a coach asks students to read from their lesson books and informally assesses their skill level). The information is then used to inform a discussion with the teacher.

CRITICAL LEARNING QUESTIONS FOR EGR PROGRAMS

Frequency and duration of coaching

- What coach-to-school or coach-to-teacher ratio is feasible and the most cost-effective?
- How frequently do coaches need to visit teachers to see measurable improvement in their instruction and on student outcomes?

Recommendations

When designing effective training and ongoing professional development for coaches, consider the following recommendations.

1. **Identify coach learning needs.** This will depend on what coaches are expected to do and their existing skill level; a baseline survey of coach knowledge and skills can be helpful in targeting training.
2. **Develop a context-specific approach to coach professional development.** Considerations regarding the cost and the long-term feasibility, scalability and sustainability of the training approach should be considered when designing training and support.
3. **Develop appropriate and comprehensive training and professional development content.** Coach professional development needs to include a range of topics. These include those listed in **Figure 2.**
4. **Scaffold, stagger and adapt professional development.** Introducing new information and skills in a gradual manner will allow coaches time to practice and build their knowledge and skills, rather than becoming overwhelmed and unable to carry out their duties effectively. Staggering professional development over time also allows for opportunities to respond to coaches' needs and challenges that arise during implementation.

5. **Provide coaches with diverse opportunities to learn new knowledge and apply new skills.** This includes formal training in a workshop setting, individual monitoring visits and, potentially, small-group peer learning. Coaches should have opportunities to practice teaching lessons, observing a lesson, recording information and giving feedback to a teacher.

6. **Develop resources to support coaches.** A coach visit protocol and a lesson observation tool are particularly helpful in supporting coaches. Their content and length should be appropriately targeted to user skill level and information needs. Allow sufficient time to develop resources for coaches and pilot observation tools.

For more details on planning for coach training and ongoing support, consult the GRN professional development module and webinar "Coaching in early grade reading programs," which includes a handout on guidance, considerations and resources for training, supporting and monitoring coaches.[60]

Frequency and Duration of Coaching

A major value of coaching is the ongoing support coaches provide to teachers outside of formal training. The more contact time a teacher has with a coach, the greater the potential for coaching to make an impact on teacher change, and to lead to improvement in student achievement.

Two factors influence how much time a coach can spend with teachers: The frequency of the visits (e.g., how often a coach visits a teacher) and the duration of the visits (e.g., how much time the coach spends with the teacher during a visit). These variables are in turn affected by how many teachers a coach is assigned, as well as the needs of in-

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 9

Cost-effective coaching: Research outcomes from Kenya

To better understand how coach-to-teacher ratios affect the outcomes of coaching and what is the most cost-effective approach, the Kenya Primary Math and Reading Initiative (PRIMR) evaluated whether the number of teachers assigned to a coach impacted the frequency of visits. The study also looked at differences in outcomes by school type, since the coach-to-school ratio was different for nonformal and public schools. It also explored causal links between the number of schools assigned to a coach and student outcomes.

When analyzing the effect of two different coach-to-teacher ratios assigned to nonformal school coaches (1:10 and 1:15) on student reading outcomes, the research found no statistically significant differences in learning gains. This may be because the number of visits per teacher was high for both groups and differed by only one visit per teacher. However, the effects of different coach-to-teacher ratios in public school zones were statistically significant. In large zones where coaches were responsible for a greater number of teachers, student reading outcomes in both Kiswahili and English were lower.

The results suggest that increasing contact between classroom teachers and coaches is important to improving learning outcomes. The findings were used to inform national scale up of the program.

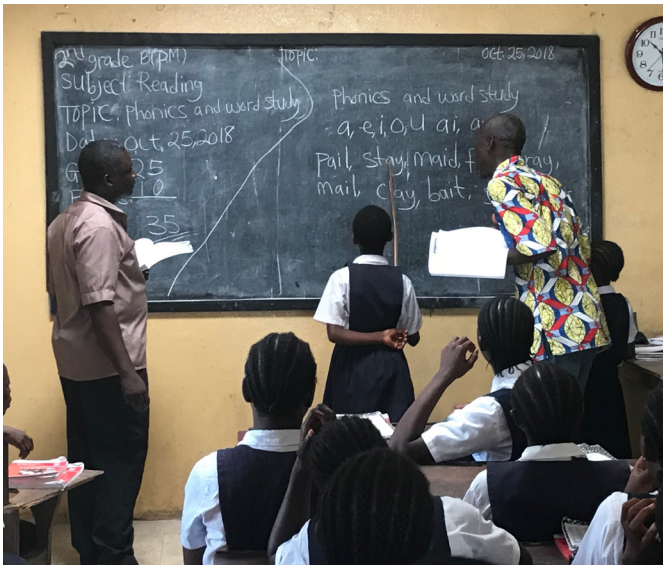
Source: Piper and Simmons Zuilkowski, 2015

60 Pallangyo & Pflepsen, 2018

61 Bean et al., 2010; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Ross, 1992; Shidler, 2009

62 Biancarosa, Bryk & Dexter, 2010 [cited in NIET, 2012]

63 Piper and Zuilkowski, 2015



A Read Liberia coach demonstrates how to teach part of a lesson. *Credit: Jennae Bulat, RTI International*

dividual teachers. All are important to consider in tandem with the focus and approach to coaching.

Key research findings: Several studies suggest that the amount of time a coach spends with a teacher is linked to changes in teacher behavior and student reading gains.[61] A longitudinal study in the United States found that schools whose teachers received the most coaching had larger increases in student learning gains.[62] Similarly, in Kenya, a randomized control trial (RCT) of an early grade reading and math initiative found that more visits from a coach were associated with better student outcomes (see **Example from practice 9).**[63] However, more research is needed to identify the frequency of coaching needed in specific contexts to improve teacher practices and student outcomes.

Another important aspect of coaching frequency and duration is its influence on the coach-teacher relationship. A study of Reading First coaches in the U.S. found a positive relationship between the amount of time coaches spent with teachers and the teachers' attitudes towards their coaches,[64] an important finding given that the coach-teacher relationship is generally one that is quite new in LMIC contexts, and one that will take both coaches and teachers time to build.

Importantly, school leaders' support for coaching also matters: A longitudinal study of coaches and teachers found that support for coaching from school leadership was a major reason coaches provided different amounts of support to different teachers, regardless of what they were assigned to do.[65] Another study of first grade reading teachers who received coaching support found that support from principals also contributed to the success of coaching in improving students' reading skills.[66]

Experiences in EGR Programs: Information gathered from several EGR programs indicates that the coach-to-school/teacher ratio and the number of coach visits per teacher varies widely across programs. This is due to several factors, including the number of coaches, the number of teachers and schools for which coaches are responsible, coach responsibilities during the coach visit

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 10

Differentiating coach support for teachers in Liberia

To provided targeted support to teachers, the Read Liberia program, supported by USAID, has developed a classroom observation tool that helps coaches identify if teachers need additional support. A value is assigned to the key instructional practices included in the classroom observation instruments that coaches use. Coaches then tally a score for a given teacher lesson observation in order to identify whether the teacher needs additional support (RTI International, 2017).

Source: RTI International, 2017

64 Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen & Zigmond, 2010

65 Biancarosa, Bryk & Dexter, 2010

66 Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011

67 Swift-Morgan, 2018

and funds available to support coaches. Variations from a few EGR programs are described below:

- Under the USAID-supported READ **Liberia** program, coaches are assigned to visit teachers once per month, although the number of visits conducted varies depending on teacher needs (see **Example from practice 10** on how coaches identify whether to differentiate support).
- Under the All Children Reading/Lecture Pour Tous program in **Senegal,** school directors are expected to engage in coaching sessions with the teachers at their schools at least twice per month. District-level inspectors are expected to visit schools at least once a quarter, or three times per year. In schools where the director is also a teacher, or where more support is needed for teachers, inspectors are expected to visit more frequently, such as twice per month.[67]
- In **Ghana,** principals and lead teachers serve as school-based coaches. They are responsible for visiting and observing the three to six teachers at their schools twice per month.[68]
- Under the national **Kenya** Tusome program, the coach-to-teacher/school ratio varies by the administrative geographic area to which coaches are already assigned by the government. Coaches—government personnel known as Curriculum Support Officers—are responsible for visiting a maximum of 45 different teachers per month (with a range of eight to 45). Coaches are expected to visit teachers monthly and are reimbursed for transportation expenses, though the program has found that not all coaches conduct the assigned visits.[69]
- In **Nigeria** (through the Northern Education Initiative Plus initiative), coaches—who are government employees known as School Support Officers—support approximately 8 to 15 teachers each, with the expectation that each teacher will be visited twice per term, for a total of six times per year. (These one-on-one visits are supplemented by periodic small-group meetings of teachers.) However, the lack of reliable funds for transportation—which is provided by the government and not the project—has meant that many coaches do not visit teachers as frequently as planned.[70]

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 11
Challenges to coaching in Sierra Leone

A recent study of coaches' experiences in an EGR program in Sierra Leone found that coaches responsible for monthly visits to 18 teachers in six primary schools were unable to meet with all teachers each month due to multiple contextual and programmatic constraints. Among others, these constraints included high rates of teacher mobility and teacher absenteeism, additional time coaches needed to work with unqualified, undertrained teachers given their limited knowledge and skills, and poor road conditions during the rainy season.

Source: Hertz, 2017

Several EGR programs found that coaches—particularly those who are not based at or near a school—struggle to meet expectations in terms of coaching frequency and duration due to multiple constraints. **Example from practice 11** describes the multiple challenges faced by coaches in Sierra Leone.

Both the Nigeria NEI Plus and Kenya Tusome programs have found that coaches who are based closer to teachers visit them more frequently.[71] Under the DFID-

68 Miksic, personal communication, 2018

69 Slade, personal communication, 2018

70 Bello & Inuwa, personal communication, 2018

71 Bello & Inuwa, personal communication, 2018; Slade, personal communication, 2018

72 Koester, personal communication, 2018

73 Slade & Wambari, 2017

supported Nigeria Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA), implementers also found that coaches did not visit schools as frequently as intended; rather than once per month, they were visiting approximately once or twice per term.[72] Similarly, an analysis of coaching data in Malawi found that some teachers were visited more frequently than others, likely due to the geographic proximity of coaches to some schools and teachers.[73] However, in many cases, programs reported they do not actually know if coaches are making the assigned number of visits to teachers—a major gap in information that precludes an evaluation of impact.

Recommendations: As described above, coach-to-teacher ratios and the frequency of coach visits vary significantly across programs. While more monitoring and evaluation needs to be conducted to pinpoint the cost-effectiveness of coaching ratios and the frequency of coaching visits for a specific country, geographic area or group of teachers, some recommendations to consider during the planning and implementation phases include the following:

1. **Consider contextual factors.** The location of the coach, the location of schools, availability of transportation, travel time and conditions, safety and security, cultural or gender-specific issues (i.e., whether women can travel alone or on motorbikes) and other potential barriers to contact time with teachers should be fully considered when identifying how many schools and teachers a coach will be responsible for supporting. The feasibility and potential cost-effectiveness of "virtual" coaching should also be assessed.
2. **Work within the government system.** Learn whether government personnel serving as coaches are already assigned to a specific number of schools. In situations where the number of schools or teachers for which a coach is assigned may be too large for a coach to provide effective support, consider testing the effectiveness of different coach-to-school/teacher ratios that would be feasible for the government to support long-term.
3. **Differentiate coaches' support to teachers.** To maximize resources and the best use of coaches' time, develop a plan for identifying which teachers should receive more (or fewer) visits from a coach over time.
4. **Consider changing the frequency of coaching over time.** Teachers may need more support during the initial stages of program implementation. Assess the outcomes of providing high-frequency coaching initially, then decreasing the amount of support once teachers become more skilled.
5. **Monitor coach visit frequency and duration.** Track coaches to verify whether they are visiting schools and teachers as planned. If not, identify why they are not (e.g., lack of transportation, too many teachers to visit as planned, lack of motivation, etc.) and identify and pilot context-specific solutions to address the specific challenges.
6. **Evaluate effectiveness of coaching ratios and visits.** Determine whether a specific coach-to-teacher or coach-to-school ratio and frequency of visits is leading to improved teacher instruction and student outcomes; if not, adjust accordingly.

A feasible, cost-effective, scalable and sustainable coach-to-school ratio and frequency of coaching may take time to determine. Moreover, coaching frequency and dosage may change over time. Information gathered through ongoing monitoring, evaluation and targeted research (including the quality of the coaching provided) can then inform changes in design.

Monitoring and Evaluating Coaching

As with other aspects of an early grade reading improvement program, coaching efforts need to be rigorously monitored and evaluated to understand what coaches are doing well, what aspects of a coaching program need to be improved and what impact coaching is having on teacher practices and student outcomes. Such information should be used to inform ongoing implementation and design of coaching activities, and, most importantly, to identify how coaching could be expanded within a country and sustained beyond the life of a project. General best practices for monitoring, evaluation and research (MER) should be applied to assessing and evaluating coaching activities. Specific guidance on MER specific to coaching include the following:

1. **Develop a monitoring, evaluation and research plan specific to coaching.** Program MER plans often do not include coaching activities. It's important that they do, and that such a plan be developed during the design phase of the coaching program, if possible, since the design of the program may be influenced by monitoring, evaluation and research needs. For example, a program may need to designate different treatment arms (or groups that each implement a different version of the coaching program) to evaluate the effectiveness—and cost-effectiveness—of certain aspects of coaching, such as the coach-to-teacher ratio, to identify what is most cost-effective and feasible.
2. **Identify MER questions related to coaching and develop an appropriate approach to answer them.** EGR programs are encouraged to identify what they need to know about their coaches and coaching activities to make informed decisions about coach recruitment, training and support, and eventually scale up and sustainability of coaching. For example, in Ghana, the EGR program is currently evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of two models of classroom observation: a 10-minute and 30-minute observation, to identify the relative cost-effectiveness of the different approaches.

FIGURE 7

Monitoring and evaluation topics on coaches and coaching

- Are coaches able to carry out their **roles and responsibilities** as planned?
- What **coaching activities** can coaches conduct well? Which activities are most effective in improving teacher instruction and student outcomes?
- Is the assigned **ratio of coaches to schools and teachers** feasible for coaches? Do coaches conduct the assigned number of visits? What is the impact of a given coach-to-teacher or coach-to-school ratio on teacher practice and student outcomes?
- What is the actual **frequency of coach visits** as compared to the planned number of visits? How many times do coaches visit specific teachers? If coaches visit some teachers more than others, why?
- What is the **quality of coaching** provided overall and by different coaches? Does the quality of coaching change over time? What **training and support** help coaches to improve?
- What **coach characteristics** (e.g., knowledge, skills, experience, etc.) result in more high-quality coaching and better teacher and student outcomes?
- What is the **impact of coaching** on improving teacher instruction and student outcomes?
- What is the **cost of coaching activities** and the overall **cost-effectiveness of the coaching approach?**

FIGURE 8

Research questions on coaches and coaching

- What **coach characteristics, qualifications and behaviors** result in high-quality, effective coaching and lead to changes in teachers' practices and student outcomes?
- What does **quality coaching** look like? What indicators can be used to measure quality?
- What is the nature of the **interaction between coaches and teachers?** What aspects of the coach-teacher relationship lead to better coaching outcomes? How can **positive coach-teacher relationships** be fostered?
- What are **teachers' experiences and attitudes** regarding coaching? What do they find more—or less—helpful in terms of coaching activities?
- How do coaches' activities, skills and the quality of their coaching **change over time?** At what point do coaches become "effective"?
- What is the relative **impact of different EGR coaching approaches and activities** in low- and middle-income country contexts in improving teacher instruction and student outcomes?

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE 12

Monitoring coach visits and interactions with teachers

To monitor coaches and better understand the nature of coach-teacher interactions, the Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) developed an observation instrument to assist program staff in recording what coaches did, the nature of their interactions with teachers and the overall quality of their coaching. After observing the coach, the staff person would meet privately with the coach to discuss the visit and identify the coach's strengths and areas for improvement. The information gathered through the observation tool was later analyzed to understand performance across coaches and identify training needs. Importantly, the coach monitoring data were shared with coaches during in-service trainings so that they could collectively see, discuss and act upon the findings, an interactive process they reported was useful and encouraging for them. The instrument used to monitor coaches and examples of how data were shared and used can be found in Pflepsen, Harden & Sankey (2016) and RTI International (2016).

Figure 7 provides a simple starter checklist of coaching-related topics to monitor and evaluate. Figure 8 includes core research questions to guide research on coaches and coaching. The list includes general research questions related to coaching in low-income country contexts that could be tailored and embedded in a specific EGR program's MER plan.

3. **Regularly monitor coaches.** Continuous monitoring of coaches is vital to informing ongoing implementation of coaching efforts. Monitoring might be more intensive during a pilot or initial phase of a program to help identify the appropriate coach-to-teacher ratio, effective coach activities or other important details needed to expand the coaching program. Monitoring should include periodic visits to observe coaches. Those who monitor coaches should record information on a standard data collection instrument so that it can be aggregated across different observers, over time and for individual coaches. Such robust monitoring data, if collected regularly and appropriately, can help a program to identify issues with individual coaches as well as for a coach cohort overall. See **Example from practice 12** above for a description of how an EGR program in Nigeria monitored coaches.
4. **Set realistic objectives for coaching outcomes over time.** A long-term view is needed in terms of the outcomes and impact that can be expected of

information on coach characteristics, frequency of school visits and quality of coaching can help to identify what makes some coaches or coaching activities more effective than others in improving teacher practices and student literacy skills. To identify a cost-effective "dosage" and frequency for coaching, a sub-set of coaches can be assigned to visit "X" number of schools/teachers per month, while another sub-set of coaches is assigned to visit "Y" number of schools/teachers per month. The results for each coach "treatment group" (improvement in teacher instructional practices and student outcomes) can be compared to identify the most cost-effective approach. For an example of such research, see Piper and Simmons Zuilkowski (2015).

7. **Plan to monitor and evaluate coaches and coaching.** Identify who will monitor coaches, for what purposes and how frequently. For example, project staff and/or government counterparts might conduct regular site visits to verify if coaches are following the coach visit protocol, or they may be assigned to collect data on the quality of coaching to ascertain ongoing training needs. In other cases, coaches may be required to submit information about their coach visits to verify they observed teachers as planned, and thus should be reimbursed for travel expenses. It is critical to identify the purpose(s) of coach monitoring, when and how frequently coaches will be monitored, which coaches will be monitored and by whom, and what data will be gathered.
8. **Design appropriate instruments for monitoring, evaluating and researching coaching.** Instruments related to coach MER need as much attention as those related to student assessment and teacher performance. As such, the development process should be inclusive of all those involved in the design, implementation and MER of coaching, including coaches. Instruments should be field tested, and the validity and reliability of the data collected should be verified. The recent "Early grade reading classroom observation toolkit" (Hertz, Kochetkova & Pflepsen, 2019), developed as part of the Reading within Reach (REACH) initiative, provides guidance on developing classroom observation instruments and templates that can be used for coaching.
9. **Communicate and use MER findings on coaching.** Information gathered from monitoring and evaluating coaches should be shared with relevant groups, including the government, donors, program managers and coaches themselves. A plan should be developed for regularly sharing information with these groups, in an appropriate way. The information should also be used in a timely manner so that various aspects of the coaching program can be improved. Ultimately, the data should inform efforts to modify and expand coaching activities.

As with all aspects of a coaching program, involvement of diverse stakeholders in the design and implementation of coaching MER, as well as the analysis and use of information that is gathered, is critical. These stakeholders include program and government personnel who play a role in the design of the coaching approach and activities, coach training and support, monitoring and evaluation and electronic data collection.

While many EGR programs' coaching activities are already underway, existing data about coaching can still be analyzed and used to inform continued implementation, as well as recommendations for scaling up and sustaining coaching efforts. Small-scale research is also possible to conduct during a short period of time on specific topics, such as the quality of coaching or the nature of coach-teacher interactions. Focus groups with coaches and the teachers they supported, intensive monitoring of a sample of coaches and other targeted efforts are also feasible and useful ways of collecting information about the realities and effectiveness of coaching in a specific context.

Scale Up & Sustainability of Coaching

As described in Effectiveness of Coaching, evidence from high-income country contexts indicates that coaching can be an effective means of improving teacher instruction and student outcomes. And although the evidence on the cost-effectiveness of early grade reading programs in low-income country contexts is more limited, it is growing.

At the same time, the recent meta-analysis of coaching programs in the U.S. found that coaching programs can be difficult to implement with fidelity on a broad scale. It also found that the impact of coaching to be less significant in programs that involved more than 100 teachers, as compared to small-scale efforts.[74] This finding is particularly salient to early grade reading programs, which are already expanding coaching initiatives based on the assumption that coaching will have a positive impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

With this in mind, efforts to scale up coaching need to be thoughtfully planned and continually assessed to determine if coaches are implementing activities as planned and whether coaching is leading to the desired results. Successfully scaling up coaching activities presents the same challenges as expanding an early grade reading program in general and requires attention to the following:

- The "ingredients" of the coaching program (e.g., coaches, training, frequency of visits) need to be the right mix to produce results;
- The approach to coaching must be feasible for the government to successfully implement; and
- The enabling conditions—policies, practices and leadership to support coaching—must exist.[75]

Recommendations: When planning for scale up and sustainability of coaching activities, consider the following recommendations.

1. **Plan with scale up and sustainability in mind.** Scale up and sustainability need to be at the forefront of discussions related to the design of coaching programs. A clear understanding of what will be feasible in a given context should drive decisions at the outset. This requires gathering information to identify who will be responsible for coaching, how many visits coaches are likely to be able to make, and how much coaching activities will cost. An initial design should be pilot tested, with field testing of coach observation instruments and other aspects of the program built into the design process. Ongoing monitoring of implementation and rigorous and appropriate evaluation should drive refinements of the approach that is recommended.
2. **Advocate for coaching.** Because coaching is generally new in LMIC contexts, successful implementation of a coaching program requires a significant shift in how stakeholders may traditionally conceptualize teacher professional development. Rather than view professional development as something "provided" to teachers in the form of one-off workshops outside the classroom, stakeholders need to understand that it takes place on an ongoing basis in teachers' classrooms through active collaboration with a coach. Understanding coaching and coaches' role requires EGR improvement initiatives to spend time educating stakeholders about what coaching is; partnering with them to design, implement and monitor coaching activities; and sharing results with them.

74 Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018. The studies included in the analysis were selected based on a research design that could support causal inference, e.g., randomized control trials.

75 Enabling conditions for effective EGR program scale up generally are described by DeStefano & Healey (2016). These conditions also apply to specific program components, such as coaching.

3. **Partner with stakeholders and develop capacity to support coaching.** Convincing stakeholders that coaching is an effective means to improve teacher instruction—and ultimately student outcomes—is insufficient. To help coaching firmly take hold within an education system, those working to implement early grade reading programs need to work in partnership with government actors to design contextually appropriate, feasible and cost-effective coaching programs that can be implemented on a large scale (e.g., nationally). Key tasks will include:
   - Building the capacity of the education system to manage coaching-related activities, from coach training to coach visit logistics;
   - Identifying how government education systems can adapt existing approaches to teacher training to include coaching; and
   - Working with the government to identify how coaching will be integrated into education system plans, policies, budgets and personnel job descriptions.

   All stakeholders, including coaches, should be involved in the various aspects of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of coaching activities. Those who serve as coaches should be frequently consulted to understand the challenges they face that will need to be addressed to facilitate successful scale up and sustainability. The authorities responsible for supervising and managing coaches should be integrally involved at all stages of a coaching program.
4. **Consider costs.** EGR programs need to consider the cost—and ultimately the cost-effectiveness—of coaching *during the design phase.* Key costs to consider include the cost of coaches (e.g., their salaries) and their ongoing support (professional development, materials, transportation expenses, etc.). Utilizing existing education sector personnel will reduce costs associated with coaching, though programs and governments are advised to consider what additional costs might be incurred by providing existing personnel—such as district-level supervisors or experienced teachers—with incentives for enhancing their current skills and role.
5. **Identify coaches within the education system.** Experience across EGR programs indicates that selecting government personnel who already have some form of school-based instructional support to teachers included in their job description—irrespective of whether it is currently conducted—is key. Having this responsibility already included in their job description provides an "official mandate" for them to serve as coaches. It also lays the foundation for providing professional development opportunities to government staff. Using coaches who are already on the government payroll also reduces the cost of coaching (though, in some cases, additional personnel may need to be hired). Care should be taken to train and support government personnel whose role has previously been to supervise school personnel, but not necessarily play a supportive role for teachers. Such a realignment of their job responsibilities and understanding of their roles will require time and effort.
6. **Identify potential barriers to effective coaching and ways to address them.** During the design phase and throughout implementation, identify challenges to successful coaching. Such challenges may include lack of interest or incentives to serve as a coach; lack of reliable transportation; unwillingness to travel long distances and/or on bad roads; and feeling unprepared to serve as a coach. All stakeholders—including coaches themselves—need to be involved in identifying specific barriers coaches experience and identifying potential ways of overcoming these obstacles. Some ideas that have been used in EGR programs include: incorporating coaching into a government staff person's job description; getting support for coaching from high-level officials; providing transportation allowances to coaches; bringing coaches together periodically to share experiences; and providing coaches with certificates or other incentives that are valued within the education system.
7. **Provide resources and supports that are sustainable.** Resources and processes to support and manage coaches should be localized and feasible to implement. When they become too complicated and/or require external support to manage, they are not sustainable over time. Rather, coaching resources

and logistics should be embedded within a teacher support system and simplified to the extent possible, thereby increasing the potential for coaching to become a routine part of teacher professional development.

8. **Gather evidence of what works, and how much it costs.** To support plans for scale up and sustainability, programs need to identify and communicate the effectiveness of coaching in improving teacher practices and student learning outcomes. This requires research and evaluation of essential coaching components and their cost-effectiveness, including the coach-to-teacher ratio, the frequency of school visits and the quality of coaching. Specific information regarding the cost of coach training, school visits and resources to support coaches (e.g., tablets) is essential to enable education authorities and governments to make sound decisions regarding whether they can financially support coaching "at-scale" (e.g., on a national level) and beyond the life of the project. Importantly, the cost of coaching needs to be viewed in relation to its impact, and in terms of the cost-effectiveness of other forms of teacher professional development.
9. **Prepare for coaching needs beyond early grade reading.** As students progress from early to upper primary classrooms, and as programs expand their scope beyond literacy to other subjects such as numeracy, it is important to consider how coaches need to be prepared to address teachers' needs at all grade levels. Fortunately, the coaching processes are the same regardless of grade level. However, the content focus of coaching will differ. For example, at the upper primary level, the focus on literacy sub-domains differs, with more emphasis on applied skills through comprehension activities. Additionally, in upper primary the emphasis on reading-to-learn in the content areas increases. Thus, coaches need to have a clear understanding of the ongoing development of student skills across the grade levels, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies and resources, and activities specific to literacy activities for content learning in upper primary grades.

Conclusions and Future Directions for EGR Coaching

The existing and growing body of evidence regarding the effectiveness of coaching indicates the important role that it can play in improving the quality of education. At the same time, a review of recent experiences from early grade programs finds that the design and implementation of coaching varies across programs, with many challenges encountered related to the following: recruitment and preparation of coaches; collection and use of data; and identification of a feasible and cost-effective approach to coaching that can be successfully scaled up and sustained by governments.

As programs seek to expand and improve their effectiveness, these experiences and the existing evaluation findings indicate several areas where those who support early grade reading programs can improve upon the design, implementation, evaluation and expansion of coaching initiatives. These include:

1. **Better preparation and support of coaches.** Given that instructional coaches do not exist in most countries in which EGR programs are being implemented, better preparation and support of personnel recruited to serve as coaches is needed. A few days of formal training are insufficient for creating a quality cadre of coaches, particularly when coaches have little to no background in early grade reading and how to support teachers. Coaches need to be supported on an ongoing basis by those more knowledgeable than they are with respect to early grade reading pedagogy, assessment and working with teachers. More professional development opportunities for coaches and monitoring of the quality of their coaching is needed.
2. **Improved monitoring and evaluation on the effectiveness of coaching—and use of findings.** While coaching has the potential to improve teacher instruction and student reading outcomes, significant gaps remain in what we know about the characteristics and effectiveness of essential aspects of coaching in low- and middle-income countries. This includes the frequency of coach visits, the quality of coaching provided, and the impact of specific coaching activities and approaches on improving teacher practices and student outcomes. More and better MER is needed to guide donors, governments and implementing partners on how to most cost-effectively invest limited resources to support teacher improvement through coaching. Finally, improved use of existing data is needed to inform ongoing implementation and design modifications.
3. **More attention to scale up and sustainability of coaching programs.** Currently, many programs report that governments are not convinced that coaching is worth the resources and effort needed. This makes it unlikely that programs will be sustained. Programs need to do a better job of collaborating with the wide range of entities and individuals responsible for coaching to: help them to understand its value; design a coaching approach feasible for the context; gather evidence regarding the cost-effectiveness of coaching; and identify the appropriate incentive and accountability measures for coaches and others involved in coaching efforts. Importantly, programs need to implement coaching activities hand-in-hand with government personnel so they can acquire the skills, knowledge and motivation to continue with coaching.

4. **Allow sufficient time for design, implementation and modification.** As with early grade reading programs generally, the introduction of coaching usually represents a fundamental shift in how countries have approached teacher professional development. This change generally requires a significant re-alignment of resources, as well as ongoing training and support for those identified to serve as coaches to gain the necessary skills and experiences to be effective coaches. It also requires time to build the capacity of the education system to support and manage coaches. As such, donors and implementing partners need to "take the long view." They must recognize that coaching programs will need significantly more time than has been traditionally allocated to: gather information to inform the design of a coaching program; prepare for and pilot a new coaching program, including coach training and support; develop government capacity to implement and manage coaching; and modify and evaluate a "second generation" of the pilot program.

Attention to these important issues will help to improve the knowledge and evidence base on coaching in early grade programs—and ultimately the likelihood that they will be successful and sustainable.

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Annex 1: Planning and implementing coaching: Key activities, questions and considerations

Purpose of this tool: This tool is designed to assist early grade reading teams as they plan and implement their coaching programs. Designed to guide initial discussions and decisions about the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of coaching efforts, the worksheet includes a list of key activities, questions and considerations. EGR teams are encouraged to complete the worksheet as a team, so all stakeholders' and collaborators' ideas can be considered.

How to use this tool:

1. Review the list of key activities.
2. Review the key considerations that will guide your planning of each key activity.
3. In the "Your program experience and plans" column, for each key activity:
   - identify steps or tasks that your team will undertake to carry out the activity. Identify key collaborators and people responsible. If you have already undertaken a particular activity:
     - identify lessons learned or guidance that may inform scale up of the program, or that could be shared with others in a similar context (either within the same country or in another country)
     - identify how you might need to modify an approach if you have encountered challenges during initial implementation, or if monitoring and evaluation has indicated the approach has not been effective
     - identify how your approach might need to be modified when the program is scaled up
   - Identify specific challenges with respect to each activity or key consideration. What actions need to be taken and what strategies may need to be undertaken to address them?

Source: Coaching in early grade reading programs. [Webinar]. In Early Grade Reading Program Design and Implementation: Best Practices and Resources for Success Training Series. Prepared for USAID by University Research Co., LLC. (URC) under the Reading within REACH initiative. Retrieved from https://www.globalreadingnetwork.net/resources/webinar-teacher-professional-development-and-coaching-early-grade-reading

Key activities	Questions & considerations to guide planning	Your program experience & plans
1. Identify who will serve as coaches	▪ What groups of people could potentially fulfill the role of a coach in your context? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages with respect to different groups who may be recruited as coaches in terms of their skill level and current responsibility vis-à-vis teacher support? (Consider the skills required for effective coaching.) ▪ In contexts where coaching is already underway, what have been the challenges and successes with the particular group of people/individuals who are serving as coaches? How might the successes be leveraged and the challenges be mitigated to support successful scale up and sustainability? ▪ Are coach-related responsibilities already included in the job description of the people who will or have been serving as coaches? ▪ What is the opinion of the variety of stakeholders (government officials, teachers, principals, etc.) with respect to who should serve as coaches?	
2. Identify roles and responsibilities for coaches, and draft a coach "job description"	▪ What will coaches be responsible for doing? (Consider the goal of the reading program, coaches' skill level, teacher needs, administrative needs, and logistical and management issues, such as time and funds available for coach visits.) ▪ Are coach-related job responsibilities already included in the job description of the personnel identified to serve as coaches? If not, what is the process for modifying an existing job description to include them? ▪ How might coach responsibilities be scaffolded to avoid overwhelming coaches and teachers?	
3. Identify coach-to-school (or teacher) ratio and frequency of visits	▪ What is a realistic and potentially cost-effective coach-to-school, or coach-to-teacher ratio? (Consider costs of each visit, travel time to schools, availability and conditions of transportation, road conditions, etc.)	
4. Plan for coach visits	▪ What is the goal of the coaching visit? ▪ How much time is available for a coaching visit? ▪ What specific activities will the coach conduct? ▪ How many visits can a coach conduct in a given day, week and month? ▪ What will coaches be expected to do before, during and after each visit? ▪ What resources will the coach need for each visit?	

Key activities	Questions & considerations to guide planning	Your program experience & plans
	▪ What obstacles might be encountered with respect to coach visits, and how might these be mitigated or addressed? (e.g., poor quality roads, limited or irregular public transportation, lack of fuel or funds for transport, safety and security issues, issues related to gender/ female coaches)	
5. Develop and procure resources for coaches	▪ What resources are needed to support coaches (e.g., school visit protocol, classroom observation tool)? ▪ How might technology (hardware and software) be used to support coaches and data collection? (Consider how much time and how many resources will be needed to procure, develop and sustain technology inputs and processes.) ▪ Pilot test **all resources** prior to training, and modify them as necessary based on feedback. ▪ Identify what resources will be needed for coach transportation, and how they will be provided.	
6. Develop and deliver coach training and professional development	▪ What is coaches' current skill level with respect to their expected roles and responsibilities? What areas will need the most support? ▪ What topics will be included in the coach training(s)? ▪ How will trainings/support be scaffolded and staggered? ▪ What strategies and activities will be used to train coaches and provide them with diverse and ample opportunities to practice skills learned? ▪ When will coaches be trained, and over how many days? ▪ How will they be trained? (e.g., in a workshop setting, in a small-group setting at schools, or a hybrid approach?) What resources will be needed? ▪ Who will train coaches? What training and resources will coach trainers need? ▪ What ongoing professional development opportunities will be provided to coaches? ▪ What is the plan to monitor and evaluate coach training/PD?	
7. Develop monitoring, evaluation, learning and research plan for coaching	▪ What indicators, tools and process will be used to monitor and evaluate coaching? ▪ What research can be embedded in the M&E plan to gain insight into specific aspects of your coaching program? ▪ Who will analyze coach M&E data? When will it be reviewed, and for what purpose?	

Key activities	Questions & considerations to guide planning	Your program experience & plans
8. Conduct M&E, analyze findings and communicate results	▪ What is working well with respect to the coaching program, and why? ▪ What challenges are being encountered? What is the source of the challenges? What can be done to mitigate them and improve outcomes? ▪ Is the coach-school or coach-teacher ratio effective, scalable and sustainable? ▪ To whom do results need to be communicated? How and when will results be communicated and used?	
9. Modify implementation as needed	▪ Do coach responsibilities need to be modified? ▪ Do additional, or different forms, of training and PD need to be provided? ▪ Do new or different resources need to be provided?	

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